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QUESTION OF THE VIOLATION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS IN ANY PART OF THE WORLD, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO COLONIAL AND OTHER DEPENDENT COUNTRIES AND TERRITORIES

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Written statement submitted by the International Federation of Action of Christians for the Abolition of Torture, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following communication, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[8 January 1992]

"If murders and inhuman treatment of children are to decline, the perpetrators must be punished"

1. For some months now, the associations affiliated to the International Federation have been receiving numerous reports that thousands of children have been murdered and subjected to inhuman treatment, particularly in large cities. The reports have come from all continents, the most recent being from Brazil, Guatemala, Uruguay, India, the Philippines, Pakistan, Yugoslavia, Romania and Madagascar. Unfortunately, this list is not exhaustive. All over the world, on the pretext that these children commit crimes in order to survive, the authorities allow freedom of action for paramilitary groups or private militias which do not shrink from murder, torture and disappearance.

2. There are no easy solutions; economic, social, educational and legal measures are required at the continental and indeed world levels. The credibility of the nations' commitment to respect for human rights, however, demands that we should not wait for such decisions to yield results before taking action. There is one measure that can be taken right away by all authorities which would have an immediate effect, and that is to punish the perpetrators of these crimes.

3. World public opinion cannot believe that the authorities are not aware who the perpetrators are. It expects an immediate response. To take the situation in Brazil alone, in October 1990, 560 children's bodies were discovered in a secret graveyard in the west of Sao Paulo. According to Ivanir Dos Santos, Executive Secretary of the Centro de Articulaçao de Populacoes Marginalizadas and Child Counsellor for the State of Rio de Janeiro, the bodies of 492 murdered children were discovered on wasteland in 1990; he asserts that during the first nine months of 1991, 312 children were murdered in Sao Paulo. Crimes cannot take place on such a scale without the authorities locating the perpetrators. And yet it seems that impunity is the rule.

4. For more than a year and a half, the mothers of nine black children from the Acari favela (slum) in Rio de Janeiro have been struggling in vain to find out from the authorities what has become of their children, who left one day in July 1990 with two older companions to attend a party in Mage in Baixada Fluminense. There are rumours about the identity of the suspects, but the police and justice officials are refusing to do anything. On the evening of 14 November 1991, in the Nova Jerusalem favela in the town of Duque de Caxias, six children and teenagers aged between 9 and 16 were beaten and shot in the head. Their bodies were discovered with their hands tied behind their backs on the banks of the River Saraquí. One of the victims pretended to be dead and survived. Today his life is in danger because of the threats made against him; he can provide valuable information about the identity of the murderers.

5. In the face of these tragedies, which are an outrage to the human conscience, the local and national authorities must use every possible means to prosecute those responsible and must work closely with the non-governmental organizations that are helping to protect children. As a matter of urgency, they must provide effective protection for all who are working to ensure that the truth is established and that the guilty are brought to justice.